3 - Receiving God's Grace through the Sacraments

This third step involves finding a Catholic parish and telling the pastor or his staff that you have accepted the Good News of Jesus Christ and want to become a Catholic, or that you want to learn more about Jesus and Catholicism. You will begin a process called RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults). RCIA is a continuation of your journey of discovering and embracing the truth and beauty of Catholicism and prepares you to become a full member of the Catholic Church by receiving the three Sacraments of Initiation.

Important Note: You can still join RCIA without having decided to become a Catholic. The entire first period of the RCIA process is dedicated to evangelization, to answering your questions about the Catholic faith, and to helping you reach a decision about becoming Catholic. At no time during RCIA will anyone try to force you to continue your journey into the Church.

The Rite of Christian Initiation

The RCIA process takes approximately six months to a year. It consists of three periods of study and prayer, each of which is followed by a rite, or ceremony of passage usually occurring within the context of a Sunday Liturgy.

- **Period 1: Evangelization and Precatechumenate:** This is a time to ask questions and get answers. The basic message of the Christian faith will be shared with you, and you will have the opportunity to bring up any concerns.
- **Rite 1: The Rite of Acceptance and Rite of Welcome:** During this simple rite, you are welcomed by the Christian community. Those who are not baptized will be enrolled into the "Order of Catechumens."
- **Period 2: The Catechumenate:** You will study an overview of the Catholic Faith. You will learn a lot about the Bible, the Church, the history of the Christian faith, and what Catholics believe. During this period, you will also start to develop or further develop your prayer life.
- **Rite 2: The Rite of Election and Call to Continuing Conversion:** This is the second rite occurring in the church in the presence of the congregation. Those who are not baptized have their names signed in the Book of the Elect (Revelation 20:15). Everyone is called to continue their journey to the sacraments.
- **Period 3: The Period of Purification and Enlightenment:** This is a time of prayer and conversion when you will continue to learn to turn away from sin and live a life according to the Gospel.
- **Rite 3: The Rites of Christian Initiation:** Finally you will be initiated into the life and family of the Church through the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist, usually occurring the evening before Easter at a special Liturgy called the Easter Vigil.
- **The Neophyte Year:** The first year as a new Catholic is called your neophyte year. It is a year during which the Church is called to help you enter fully into the life of the Church and continue to show great care for your spiritual development and nourishment.

Open Wide the Doors for Christ

In Catholicism we have the fullness of all God taught us and wants us to know. We have access to all the graces God has for us. In Catholicism we receive grace, mercy, peace, joy, forgiveness, and the true fulfillment of all our desires. God heals our wounds. We have the ability to see the hardships of life in a new light and unite our own sufferings to those of Jesus, who knew what it meant to suffer, and redeemed us through his own suffering (Colossians 1:24). In accepting Jesus Christ and becoming Catholic we have freedom from sin and God's help to live a virtuous life.

St. Pope John Paul II often asked Christians and non-Christians alike not to be afraid of coming to Jesus. "Do not be afraid. Do not be satisfied with mediocrity. Do not be afraid to accept Christ and his power. Open wide the doors for Christ." There is no greater decision you will make in your entire life than to have faith in Jesus Christ for your salvation. Your eternal destination depends on it.

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Bible Version

Revised Standard Version – with Apocrypha

Ecclesiastical approval for publication granted by the Most Reverend Allen H. Vigneron, Archbishop of Detroit, November 3, 2014

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Why Be Catholic?

Why Become Catholic?

G.K. Chesterton once said, "The difficulty of explaining 'why I am a Catholic' is that there are ten thousand reasons all amounting to one reason: that Catholicism is true."

The Catholic Church is the "pillar and bulwark of truth" (1 Timothy 3:15) because it is the Church founded by Jesus Christ who is God. 2,000 years ago the Son of God became incarnate on earth; that is, he became fully man and received a human body while remaining fully divine. Jesus Christ walked and breathed, cried and loved, preached and healed.

Why did God's Son come to earth as a man? Due to sin, humanity has a broken relationship with God. Jesus came to earth as a man in order to repair that relationship. While on earth, Jesus was tortured and killed, and three days later he rose from the dead. This sacrifice, the giving of his own life, atoned for our sins so that our relationship with God could be restored. Through faith in Jesus Christ we have access to a new relationship with God so that we can spend eternity with God (in heaven) instead of apart from God (in hell). Jesus established the Catholic Church to be an extension of himself, so that every person would have access to that new, healed relationship with God.

The Catholic Church as Part of God's Plan of Salvation

In God's all-wise and loving plan, the Catholic Church is the means by which the graces of salvation merited by Christ's sacrifice are distributed to those who are sincerely seeking salvation. As Founder of the Catholic Church, Jesus ordained that it provide and administer the sacraments as means of transmitting his life-saving grace. Sacraments are signs that convey God's grace. For example, in the Sacrament of Baptism you are washed in water, a sign that outwardly shows the spiritual reality of having your sins forgiven and becoming a member of God's family. In Baptism you are marked forever as a child of God, and nothing can separate you from God's love (Romans 8:38-39).

The graces bestowed through the Catholic Church's seven sacraments help those who receive them to grow in holiness, that is, in closer union with God. The ultimate goal is to preserve this union during our earthly lives so that we may enjoy it forever in heaven. In becoming Catholic, we have the hope of heaven and seeing God face to face.

Why We Need the Catholic Church – In a Nutshell

1. We are made in God's image and likeness, meant for a deep, loving relationship with him (Genesis 1:27).
2. Due to sin, we have broken this friendship with God (Romans 6:23).
3. Jesus Christ, God's Son, became man, died on the cross, and rose from the grave for our salvation (Philippians 2:7-10).
4. We are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, and through Jesus our relationship with God is restored (Ephesians 2:8).
5. Through the Catholic Church which Jesus established while on earth, we have access to grace by Baptism and are nourished by the Eucharist and other sacraments (Matthew 16:18-19).
6. Through these sacraments, the Holy Spirit changes us, perfects us, fulfills our every desire, ultimately bringing us to eternal beatitude in heaven (Matthew 5:48).

Becoming a Catholic

Becoming a Catholic Christian involves the following:

1. ***Accepting the Good News*** revealed by Jesus Christ, the Son of God, repenting of one's sins, and having faith in Jesus Christ for one's salvation
2. ***Reordering one's life*** as a disciple of Jesus Christ
3. ***Receiving God's grace*** through the Sacraments of Initiation and becoming a member of God's family

1 - Accepting the Good News

In order to accept the Catholic Faith as the one true Faith, one must believe that Jesus Christ is God. If Jesus Christ is not God, then there is no compelling reason to devote your whole life to following him and the Church he founded. C.S. Lewis once said that Jesus was either a lunatic, a liar, or the Lord. The reality of Jesus forces us all to make a decision about who he is.

"I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse." (***Mere Christianity***)

Once you have heard the message of Jesus Christ, the first step is to accept it, repent of your sins, and have faith in Jesus Christ for your salvation. God loves you and wants to save you. We must cooperate with His grace. Go to Jesus in prayer anytime and talk to Him. He hears you! There are even instances in Scripture where certain persons pray to Jesus after His death. In the Book of Acts we read how, "as they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit'" (Acts 7:59). In Acts 9:10–17, we read that "the Lord" told Ananias to go and find Saul (vs. 11), who had just been blinded by an epiphany of Jesus on the way to Damascus. Yet, when Ananias told Paul what he heard in prayer, he said that it was "the Lord Jesus" who sent him so that Saul might regain his sight and be filled with the Spirit (vs. 17). This can only mean that Ananias spoke with Jesus Himself in prayer. This is both an act of worship and a clear indication (from the powers and prerogatives exercised) that Jesus is God.

2 - Reordering Your Life

After a large group of Jews heard St. Peter preach the Gospel message, 3,000 of them accepted Jesus Christ as the Messiah and asked Peter what they should do next. Peter said, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Then in response to the favor they had received, "they held steadfastly to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers" (Acts 2:38, 42).

Just as the 3,000 Jews realized, after you accept Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord, there is more to do than just believe in him. You must reorder your life according to the truth of God. This means making a commitment to daily prayer and obeying the Ten Commandments and all other Catholic moral teaching. God has given us instructions on how to live our lives, not because he wants to restrict our freedom and make us miserable, but because as our Maker, he knows what attitudes, behaviors, and relationships will bring us the most joy in this life and the next.

Jesus said, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." (Matthew 16:24-25) Becoming Catholic is to accept the truth of God instead of the lies of the sinful world. St. Paul says that disciples must not be "conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2).

Although giving up our selfish, sinful habits is difficult, the fruits of choosing to lay down our lives and become followers of Jesus Christ are attractive. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Galatians 5:23). St. Augustine, once a follower of all the temptations the world had to offer, finally realized that nothing he sought after in the world would give him peace. Even indulging in all the pleasures of the world, he was ultimately left empty. He found that "our hearts are restless until they rest in" the Lord. His ***Confessions*** is one of the timeless classics of Christian literature.